

critical digest

VOL. IV No. 3

September 17, 1951

The Weekly Newsletter Digest of the Current New York Theatre Scene

New York Openings This Week

Borscht Capades-Royale, 9/17/51. Hal Zeiger presents an English Yiddish musical revue with Mickey Katz, Phil Foster, Dave Barry and Joel Grey. Out West of Eighth-Barrymore, 9/20/51. Courtney Burr and Malcolm Pearson present Kenyon Nicholson's comedy directed by Marc Connelly. Robert Keith, Jr., Richard Carlyle, Donald McClelland and Mary Carver are featured.

Digests of Current Reviews

Bagels and Yox-Holiday, 9/12/51. Fransky and Beckman "Yiddish-American" revue may be all right for a very specialized audience, that understands Yiddish, but it didn't win the approval of the critics. Hawkins, WT&S, and Field, Newark News, were the only daily reviewers who filed favorable reports. Former found it an ingratiating, heart-warming entertainment, while the latter thought it was a nicely balanced revue with considerable talents. Master of ceremonies Lou Saxon and comedian Larry Alpert were praised. Coleman, Mirror, and Pollock, Compass, filed mild "con" reports because they thought the show was very successful for its limited audience. Atkinson, Times, was sorry the ancient Jewish music was wasted. Most noted that all gag lines were in Yiddish, but first nighters enjoyed themselves. Watts, Post, remarked on the curious lack of confidence in the performers. Several suggested the microphone was unnecessary. Revue which had been a long run hit in Miami and Atlantic City was considered night club entertainment, not theatre.

Lace on Her Petticoat-Booth, 9/4/51. Six weekly critics filed mild "con" reviews against Herman Shumlin's production of Aimee Stuart's Scottish romantic comedy. They agreed that the production featured some fine writing and superb performances; but the over abundance of talk and plot made for a dull evening. Perlita Nelson, Muriel Aked, Neva Patterson, Jeff Morrow and Patsy Bruder shared praises, though Morehouse feared the latter screeched too much opening night. Time critic found play had all the speed of flowing molasses and a good deal of stickiness. While Gabriel, Cue, thought it was more like prodding a glow worm. Bron, Variety, noted play was clean with few false notes, but third act was much too melodramatic. Nathan classed it among the species written by English women authors with little that is dramatically galvanizing. Francis, Billboard, enjoyed some fine, tender moments, but considered the play's basic concept completely removed from our way of thinking.

Out of Town Reviews

Lindsay and Crouse comedy Remains To Be Seen debut in New Haven was tabbed a winner by Bone, Variety and Golly, Billboard. Cleverly contrived story, perfect cast and direction blend into a sure box office hit, they agreed. Comedy featuring Jackie Cooper and Janis Page is scheduled to arrive October 3rd at the Morosco.

Editorial Pros & Cons

Theatre must stop using TV as an excuse. Everything from poor box office to poor production has been blamed on the new entertainment medium. The legitimate theatre industry would be wise to heed the example of the motion picture industry. The latter, discovering that many were not attending films because pre-promotion of the production had slackened, have launched a super promotion campaign. Similar campaigns in the theatre field might put an end to some of the so-called "TV Blues."

' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

- | | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. NY Times | 12. Chr. Science Monitor | 23. Commentary |
| 2. NY Herald Tribune | 13. Journal of Commerce | 24. Commonweal |
| 3. NY News | 14. Morning Telegraph | 25. Cue |
| 4. NY Mirror | 15. Ward Morehouse | 26. Nation |
| 5. NY Compass | 16. George Jean Nathan | 27. New Leader |
| 6. NY Post | 17. Wall Street Journal | 28. New Republic |
| 7. NY Journal American | 18. Women's Wear | 29. Newsweek |
| 8. NY World Tele-Sun | 19. Billboard | 30. New Yorker |
| 9. Brooklyn Eagle | 20. Variety | 31. Park East |
| 10. LI Press | 21. Critical Digest | 32. Saturday Review |
| 11. Newark News | 22. Theatre Arts | 33. Time |

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommends the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening. Unless otherwise noted critics voted "pro."

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| AFFAIRS OF STATE-9/25/50 | - Con: 1-6-9-12-15-16-17-18-22-24-28-29-32.
None: 10-14-21-23-25-26-27-31. |
| CALL ME MADAM-10/12/50 | - Con: 19-22-26-28. So-So: 3. None: 10-14-21-23-31. |
| GENTLEMEN PREFER BLONDES-12/8/50 | - Con: 6-26. So-So: 16-19-24-25-33.
None: 10-21-23-31-32. |
| GUYS AND DOLLS-11/24/50 | - Con: 26. None: 10-21-31. |
| LACE ON HER PETTICOAT-9/4/51 | - Con: 1-2-4-6-7-8-9-15-16-17-18-19-20-25-33.
None: 12-22-23-26-27-28-29-30-31-32. |
| THE KING AND I-3/29/51 | - Con: 26. None: 10-21-22-23-24-31. |
| THE MOON IS BLUE-3/8/51 | - Con: 16-22. None: 10-21-23-26-31-32. |
| THE ROSE TATTOO-2/3/51 | - Con: 4-6-7-12-16-22-32-33. None: 10-17-21-23-24-27-31. |
| SEVENTEEN-6/22/51 | - Con: 2-7-26-29-30-33. None: 10-21-22-23-27-28-31-32. |
| SOUTH PACIFIC-4/7/49 | - Con: 33. So-So: 25.
None: 5-9-10-11-21-23-24-26-27-28-31. |
| STALAG 17-5/8/51 | - Con: 4-25-26-27-30. So-So: 4.
None: 10-21-22-23-31. |
| A TREE GROWS IN BROOKLYN-4/19/51 | - Con: 2-7-16-19-26-27-32-33.
None: 10-15-21-22-23-31. |
| TWO ON THE AISLE-7/19/51 | - Con: 2-3-26. None: 10-12-22-23-27-28-31-32. |

' Book Notes '

"Shaw's Plays in Review" a collection of notices by Sir Desmond MacCarthy on Shaw's plays during 47 years published by Thames and Hudson..."Fifty Years of American Comedy" by Bill Treadwell, published by Exposition Press...Alfred Lunt is writing a cookbook...Theatre Information Service published "The Keys to Broadway" booklet giving useful information to young theatre people..."Fact Book" Concerning the Plays of Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II" given free to editors, writers and libraries by Lynn Farnol...Minstrel Carnival presented at Keen's English Chop House for "A Song in His Heart" biography of minstrel composer James A. Bland. Keen's is site of original Lambs Club house.

"Once Around the Sun" by Atkinson, Times, soundly and warmly endorsed by Watts Post, and Brown, SHL..."The Later Ego" by London critic James Agate received lukewarm review from Krutch, Nation, who found the style neither highly entertaining nor original, yet classed the book as a very readable "melange."

' Green Room Department '

SENSIBLE RESEARCH...Queries being asked patrons of Henry Miller Theatre are difficult to answer, comments Eaton, LI Press. It's silly to ask a patron how many times a month he attends the theatre if it is the first visit in six months. Instead of the usual surveys of audiences, the researchers would be wiser to cross examine the millions of potential ticket buyers who never go to the theatre.

CRITICAL THOUGHTS...Shaw's In Good King Charles' Golden Days recommended by Watts, Post, to any producer ready for GBS...Baseball should appoint a drama critic, not a czar, suggests Ruark, WT&S. Dorothy Parker is his choice...An unlecture bureau of speakers whom people would pay NOT to listen to proposed by Chapman, News.

THEATRE'S BAD NAME...Archaic attitude that regards anyone connected with the theatre as a moral leper must be stopped, comments Burr, Playbill. One way may be by calling the nasty smugness of the name callers to the attention of right thinking and intelligent people. Actually the theatre is, and always has been, less addicted to ethical lapses than almost any other field.

COLUMN TIPS...A pessimistic musical comedy producer is selling out rate opening night tickets, hears Gardner...Producers of another Broadway musical are quietly checking up on their box office help, whispers Walker...William Saroyan offered bids to do two Broadway shows, says Kilgallen.

ACTORS & NATIONS...Comparing British, French and American actors, Clurman, New Republic, finds the English breed the best. He looks and sounds like an actor. Above all stands the English character actor, whose simple, graphic effectiveness is a joy to behold. The French actor is as neglected as his decaying theatre. While the American actor needs more training, experience and opportunity to develop as an artist. Permanent practice is the cure.

HIGHER PRICES FEARED...As a result of recent wage increases granted to various unions, a general rise in the price of theatre tickets is feared by Variety. The new increases will mean a payroll increase of \$12,000 a week for the combined current shows. Soaring production costs and operating overhead have already forced several adjustments. There has also been a tendency to seek larger capacity theatres for both musicals and straight shows.

STAY EAST...Actors who are mainly interested in learning their professions and having distinguished careers were advised to think before rushing to Hollywood by Watts, Post. There is evidence that the motion pictures aren't the best way to succeed in their careers. Several actors have tried to make the jump and have succeeded only in interrupting promising stage careers.

' Theatre News Round Up '

Frank Farrell, WT&S, took over WNBT "Footlights and Kleiglites" morning telecast from Ben Grauer...Joseph Shipley, New Leader, switches his first night reviews on WEVD to 11:30 PM this year...September "Theatre Arts" contains articles by Hawkins, WT&S, Kronenberger, Time, Kerr, Commonweal, Allison, Herald Tribune, and an article on NY drama critics by Richard Gehman...Marc Connelly appointed to the U.S.National Commission for UNESCO...Herman Shumlin dispute with ATPAM over Lee Sabinson settled...Masque and Lyre Light Opera Company to tour next season...Broadway Angels, Inc. 29 West 65th Street, forming syndicate of unlimited show backers at 50 cents per share...Box office treasurers won a \$5 week increase...Hobe Morrison, Variety, has article on coming season in current Harper's Bazaar...St. John Terrell selling his Lambertsville, NJ, Music Circus tent for \$6,000.

- - - - -
' Interview Hi-Lights '
- - - - -

FRED FINKLEHOFF...Producer of forthcoming The Quiet Room has a set of unusual ideas which would keep the critics busy, Hawkins, WT&S, discovered. Plays should be submitted to the critics for their opinions of their possibilities and ideas for casting. The critics should also help improve shows after they open by returning a second time. Reviewers in other towns should encourage all theatre, not just plays with top stars.

ALEXANDER KIRKLAND...Actor-author and drama critic of "Park East" started writing when he was in the awkward acting age, between juveniles and heavies, he told WNBT Ben Grauer. Given the choice he likes writing better than acting. The former leaves him free for travel and other activities.

- - - - -
' Meet the Critic - George Freedley '
- - - - -

Critics should be interpreters of the drama, not arbitrators, George Freedley told "Critical Digest" in an exclusive interview. Curator of the NY Public Library Theatre Collection, who doubles as drama editor of the Morning Telegraph and American drama critic for Theatre News-Letter, was the Morning Telegraph's critic for ten years while Whitney Bolton was on the West Coast. Freedley feels the role of arbitrator is doubly important when covering foreign plays. There the reviewer must consider the background of the author to help make the play understandable to the American public. The attitude of some "so-called" critics, for example in calling the ANTA-sponsored Louis Jouvet company "boring" was deplorable. It's too bad, he commented, that these critics should allow their own boredom to affect their criticism.

Though he might be a little on the prejudiced side, because he is secretary of the Board of Directors of ANTA, Freedley does feel they have done an amazing job. It's unfortunate so much unfair negative criticism was leveled at them. Criticism must have a positive attitude to do any good. This season's plans of five plays on a completely subscription basis should work out better than last year's ten play season. In picking Robert Whitehead as managing director, ANTA has made a wise choice. Commercial producers cannot complain that ANTA competes with them if they stick to a subscription system. Then if any play becomes a hit a producer can buy it from the author, not ANTA. Federal subsidy would be all right for the federally-chartered group if politics could be kept out.

Television in the long run, Freedley believes, will be an aid to the theatre. Not only in its job-giving aspects, which keeps actors, writers and directors employed. But in that it will accustom people to the theatre, especially if theatre TV becomes popular.

Freedley and the NY Public Library Theatre Collection celebrated their 20th year together on September 1st. In 1931 after a few seasons as stage manager and actor, the Yale Drama School graduate urged the Library to set up a special theatre section. Six months after he suggested the plan, the new department was opened. A graduate of the University of Richmond, Freedley earned his MFA at Yale in stage lighting. In addition to many books on the theatre during the years, he is the current secretary of the NY Drama Critics Circle.

- - - - -
' Legit Stuff '
- - - - -

City College student Philip Zeman arranging free tickets to little theatre productions for servicemen at 135 West Kingsbridge Road, Bronx.

